

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-12

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FM AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5832

INFO AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

C O N F I D E N T I A L KATHMANDU 3092

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINR, NP

SUBJECT: EMBASSY COMMENTARY ON PRIME MINISTER BISTA'S RESIGNATION

REF: KATHMANDU 3053

SUMMARY: WHILE PROXIMATE CAUSE FOR PRIMIN BISTA'S RESIGNATION WAS OSTENSIBLY THE DEVASTATING SINGHA DURBAR FIRE, IT IS UNCLEAR WHETHER BISTA WAS MOVED TO RESIGN BY CUMULATIVE FRUSTRATIONS OR ENCOURAGED TO DO SO BY PALACE TO PROVIDE SCAPEGOAT FOR FIRE AND OTHER ADMINISTRATIVE ILLS. PREPONDERANCE OF EVIDENCE SEEMS TO POINT TO LATTER. END SUMMARY.

1. NO REASON HAD AS YET BEEN PUBLICLY STATED FOR BISTA'S

JULY 16 RESIGNATION. WHILE RESIGNING PREMIERSHIP, BISTA RETAINS NATIONAL PANCHAYAT SEAT (WITH TWO YEARS LEFT FOR TERM AS ONE OF KATHMANDU'S TWO REPRESENTATIVES), AND IN STATEMENT ISSUED TO PRESS PLEDGED TO "CONTINUE TO WORK ACTIVELY AND SINCERELY TO FULFILL NOBLE WISHES OF HIS MAJESTY."

2. IN ACCEPTING BISTA'S RESIGNATION AND THAT OF CABINET, KING BIRENDRA "THANKED THE OUTGOING COUNCIL OF MINISTERS FOR DISCHARGING THEIR DUTIES HONESTLY AND SINCERELY DURING THEIR
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TENURE OF OFFICE," ACCORDING PALACE COMMUNIQUE. BISTA THEREFORE

WENT OUT WITH PUBLIC PAT ON BACK.

3. BISTA HAS LONG BORNE BRUNT OF VIRULENT DOMESTIC CRITICS, PARTICULARLY SINCE THE DEMISE OF HIS LATE PATRON KING MAHENDRA, AND THERE IS AN EQUALLY LONG IF CLOSELY HELD RECORD OF HIS FRUSTRATIONS OVER THE STYLE OF YOUNG KING BIRENDRA, PRIMARILY BECAUSE OF PALACE USURPATION OF WHAT BISTA CONSIDERED HIS PREROGATIVES AS PRIMIN AND THE DAILY ADMINISTRATION OF THE GOVERNMENT.

4. IN WAKE OF SINGHA DURBAR FIRE BISTA CAME IN FOR INTENSE CRITICISM, WITH OPPOSITION CENTERING ATTACKS ON "HIS" APPOINTMENT, OVER OJECTION OF NATIONAL PANCHAYAT, OF ONE-MAN INVESTIGATIVE COMMISSION (HOME-PANCHAYAT SECRETARY) TO DETERMINE CAUSE OF FIRE. IT IS RELIABLY REPORTED HOWEVER THAT APPOINTMENT OF THIS SINGLE INVESTIGATOR WAS IN FACT DECREED BY KING, OVER BISTA'S STRENUOUS OBJECTIONS (NBK 2741). FOLLOWING BISTA'S RESIGNATION PALACE PROMPTLY ANNOUNCED APPOINTMENT BY HIS MAJESTY OF THREE-MAN COMMISSION, HEADED BY CHIEF JUSTICE, TO INVESTIGATE FIRE AND "GO INTO THE DEPTHS REGARDING CERTAIN SUSPICIOUS CAUSES AND SUBMIT TRUE FAVFS..." (THIS CONSTITUTED FIRST PUBLIC ACKNOWLEDGEMENT THAT THERE MAY HAVE BEEN "SUSPICIOUS CAUSES;" CF. KATHMANDU 2979).

5. OF PARTICULAR SIGNIFICANCE AMONG PLETHORA OF EDITORIALS ADVOCATING BISTA'S RESIGNATION WHICH APPEARED AFTER THE FIRE WAS ONE IN NAYA SAMDESH WEEKLY OF JULY 13, SIGNED BY EDITOR-PUBLISHER RAMESH NATH PANDE. EDIT TOOK NOW FAMILIAR LINE OF OPPOSITIONISTS CRITICIZING BISTA FOR IGNORING PANCHAYAT AND APPOINTING HOME PANCHAYAT SECRETARY AS INVESTIGATOR AND IWONCLUDED "HE SHOULD THEREFORE ACCEPT MORAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE FIRE AND SUBMIT HIS RESIGNATION." PANDE IS ALSO EDITOR-PUBLISHER OF DAILY ENGLISH-LANGUAGE NEW HERALD WHICH IS OFTEN USED BY PALACE FOR LEAKS AND IS WIDELY CONSIDERED TO REFLECT PALACE VIEWS.

6. SINGHA DURBAR FIRE MAY HAVE BEEN STRAW WHICH BROKE BACK OF BISTA'S RELATIONSHIP WITH PALACE. WHILE CUMULATIVE FRUSTRATIONS WITH HIS LOT MAY HAVE MOTIVATED BISTA TO RESIGN, WE BELIEVE PREPONDERANCE OF EVIDENCE INDICATES PALACE ENCOURAGED HIM TO CONFIDENTIAL

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DO SO IN ORDER TO PROVIDE A SCAPEGOAT FOR THE FIRE AND OTHER ADMINISTRATIVE ILLS AND TO PREPARE FOR THE FUTURE WITH A NEW LOOK. BISTA IS NOT IN DISGRACE, HOWEVER, AND COULD WELL RE-EMERGE TO PROMINENCE AT SOME POINT IN THE FUTURE.
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